

## District 61 - Released prisoners and their identification cards

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**To:** <alexanderlipsey@house.mi.gov>  
**Date:** 3/1/2006 9:56:51 AM  
**Subject:** Released prisoners and their identification cards  
**CC:** <jackhoogendyk@house.mi.gov>, <lorencewenke@house.mi.gov>

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Dear Representative Lipsey,

I'm writing today because I understand that you are holding hearings looking into the issues surrounding people leaving Michigan prisons without adequate identification. My organization has an interest in this situation because we are working within the MPRI program in Kalamazoo County to help returning offenders get employment and stability as soon as possible following their release from prison. Also, Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan has been part of the Work First program in this County for over 10 years, including the Non-Custodial Parent program. I mention the Non-Custodial parents because this group has always included some individuals who were recently released when referred to us.

Criminal justice experts tell us that the first days and weeks after release are critical to success for offenders in avoiding a quick return to incarceration. Immediate employment is the best result we can hope for to allow a successful return to the community. But, employment requires identification. Federal rules require a picture ID and Social Security Card (with some limited alternatives) in order to be employed. Employers must have these on record and to complete the I-9 Form for Employment Eligibility Verification. If the returnee saved his/her prison ID, this can often qualify (for employers), but it is then part of the permanent employment record. Unfortunately, we are told, the prison ID does not qualify for the Secretary of State.

In our experience, most returning offenders (about 70%) have the necessary information to get new identification from the Sec. of State's offices. When they have a picture ID (7-10 days after going to the Sec of State) they can then go to the Social Security office to get a card. But, that can be two weeks without employment – even the Transitional Employment that we use in Kalamazoo to try to engage as soon as possible.

For about 3 out of ten returning offenders, they have to start from scratch: piecing together school records, birth certificates, police records, or whatever will prove who they are so that they can obtain essential ID's. This can take time (up to a month), and money for copies of records as well as the State ID itself.

The bottom line, from our point of view, is that people enter prison with identification, why can't they come out with identification. Too much staff time and program money is used trying to rectify a situation that should be handled by the STATE.

Respectfully Yours,

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